
Pro Rege

Volume 28 | Number 4

Article 4

June 2000

Defining Moments in Western-Global History

Harry Van Dyke

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Van Dyke, Harry (2000) "Defining Moments in Western-Global History," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 28: No. 4, 22 - 33.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol28/iss4/4

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

Western Civilization or World History: A True Dilemma?



by Harry Van Dyke

My task at this symposium is to discuss the unfolding relationship between western and other world cultures, particularly by addressing some of the following questions: First, what are the most important themes and developments in this relationship that need our attention, and in what way does a Christian perspective govern our selection of them? Secondly, do these developments show any recognizable patterns, and if so, how have these developments shaped today's world?

Dr. Harry Van Dyke is Professor of History at Redeemer College, Ancaster, ON.

Our topic is of immediate concern for curriculum design. What should we be teaching if we want to meet our institutional objectives as Christian liberal arts colleges? Should the required general education program include a course or two that surveys our Western Civilization? Traditionally, we have said, Of course! But for some time now we also have been challenged to include a course (or courses) in *global* history in the common curriculum—but without increasing the *size* of the general program. *Voilà* our first dilemma: How do we study both western and global history in one or two courses, and how shall we select the key developments to study? Apart from such practical questions, a prior question needs to be asked: What *is* global history? Is it something like universal history—the study of human culture around the world, or throughout the ages, or both?

Thinking about these questions, I came to realize rather keenly that I can think and speak only as a Westerner. For that matter, all of us here today share the same “situatedness.” The space capsule we inhabit has only one escape hatch, albeit a crucial one: before being citizens of a nation on earth we know ourselves to be first of all citizens of the Kingdom of heaven, under the rule of Jesus Christ over all earthly affairs in all times and all places, however much “His and our enemies” may protest. Put another way, “there is no neutral ground in the universe: *every square inch, every split second*, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan.”¹ And therefore, as I lead you in addressing the above questions, I want to affirm the following as my point of departure: culture is

at bottom a spiritual response to a creation order that we all deal with, and Christianity gives us a transcendent reference point which relativizes all cultures, including our own.²

Global contacts

In part, Western Civilization is itself the product of growing global contacts. The roots of western civilization first emerged in the fertile river valleys of the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates. The successive masters of these regions—Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians—imposed their rule far and wide, but never as far as the Indus River. Alexander the Great made contact but had to abandon his push eastward. As he wheeled around to move west, his plans were aborted by his untimely death. There is little evidence of further contact between these Near Eastern empires and the civilizations on the Indus and the Ganges river valleys, much less with those along the great rivers of China or the civilizations of Central and South America. It fell to a more western people, the Romans, to take the Near Eastern and Mediterranean culture westward, to the shores of the Atlantic ocean.

However, this expansion did not yet result in the quintessential West. Even at its widest extent, the Greco-Roman world, excelling in government organization and military strength, was still a *pagan* world, a world resplendent in cultural achievements yet living in culpable ignorance of the Creator, with foolish distortion, suppression or substitution of Divine revelation in Creation. This would not change until the coming of Christianity. In the words of the apostle Paul, “We bring you the unknown God, the God of heaven and earth; the times of your ignorance He has overlooked, but now He calls all men to repentance” (Acts 17).

When, after some 300 years, the spirit of Christianity began to permeate and animate the decaying culture of Antiquity, what was born came to be called Christendom—a civilization that was intent on realizing God’s order for the world, that aimed (but often failed) to create a human society in harmony with Divine law. The old empire of eternal Rome was translated westward to the Germanic Europeans, to rest on the anointed and crowned head of Charles the Great—the New Testament David, the king after God’s heart, as his

contemporaries, and people long after him, believed. Charlemagne read in the Gospel, “Compel them to enter in,” and following St. Augustine’s commentary he adopted Muslim methods and converted a great many heathen Saxons to Christianity at the point of the sword. Charlemagne also sponsored a revival of ancient learning in order to have an educated Christian clergy, but in the case of the Saxons he did the gospel a disservice.

Just as this Western world was beginning to take on its new identity, it was threatened by militant Islam. Muslim invasions from the southwest were

*In part, western civilization
is itself the product of
growing global contacts.*

rebuffed by Charles the Hammer and his mighty cavalry, while their invasions from the southeast were held up by the old Eastern Roman Empire centered on Byzantium. For centuries the Byzantine empire acted as a sea-dyke, sheltering the West till it could mature and match Islam in cultural organization and achievements. During the middle ages, the West was allowed to develop in virtual isolation. Mongol hordes from central Asia under Genghis Khan, and later under Tamerlane, might have conquered Europe in their turn if they hadn’t become mired in the vast reaches of Orthodox Russia and the Muslim Middle East.

In early modern times, the West again barely escaped being inundated by Islam. On two occasions the Muslim Turks of the Ottoman Empire poured into Europe up to the walls of Vienna. In 1528, this menace prevented Emperor Charles V from trying Luther a second time, and by the time he had repulsed the Turks, Lutheranism was too strongly entrenched for him to eradicate it. As late as 1683, the Turks again streamed in but were defeated when a combined German-Polish force arrived to raise the siege of Vienna.

Modern times saw global conflicts that were greater than ever before. Attempts, after World War I, to create world-wide collective security through the League of Nations failed. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, King Haile Selassie addressed

the League of Nations with these words: "If you now permit us to suffer alone, you will all have to suffer in the end." Earlier, when Japan annexed Korea in 1910, the West remained largely indifferent. But the "yellow danger," as it was called, came closer to home when Pearl Harbor was attacked, igniting the full fury of a second global war within two decades.

The painful consequences of that conflict were also felt here on the home front. In both Canada and the U.S.A., citizens of Japanese extraction were forcibly moved inland from the Pacific coast, where Japanese invasion forces might try to land. As early as 1938, the government of Canada had the "foresight" to register all Japanese Canadians—their families, place of residence, and occupation—a measure somewhat akin to the registration in those very years of German Jews under the Nazi regime, with milder intentions, to be sure, but all the same. . . . Of course, in 1942 Canada was only repeating an earlier "war measure": at the outbreak of World War I, the government deprived Ukrainian Canadians of their citizenship, rounded up 60,000 of them, and shipped them to northern regions to cut timber and dig mines. Ironically, many of these "enemy aliens" had come to Canada on Austrian passports, having emigrated because they did not want to serve in the uniform of the Habsburgs, a service to which they were liable as Austrian subjects living in the province of Galicia. Likewise, when Japanese Canadians were herded onto the trucks in 1942, some of the older men shook their heads in disbelief: they had fought in the trenches of WWI under the Canadian flag; some were even decorated for bravery in combat.

If these sad events exhibit any kind of pattern, it would be, I think, that xenophobia is endemic to all peoples: within Western cultures, within non-Western cultures, and in the relations between them. Especially in times of diplomatic crises, economic hardship, and imminent danger—real or perceived—scapegoats are easily found and public anger is unleashed on those who have no defenders: gypsies, draft dodgers, Jews, homosexuals, United Empire Loyalists ("Tories"), Moors, and so on.

Another pattern is that the standoffs of the middle ages are recurring today, though under

different circumstances and power structures. All along a belt of Islamic peoples, from Morocco and the Balkans to Bangladesh and beyond, into Malaysia and Indonesia, there is unrest, hostility, war. And in many cases, they reflect conflict between "the West and the rest."

Global dominance

In 1500, the West was a small, hemmed-in cultural zone hugging the Atlantic shores. By 1650, a map of the world boasted such names as New Spain, New France, New England, New Sweden, New Holland and New Zealand. Only the last name has stuck, but none of the areas in question ever lost their European connection. What had happened?

The Renaissance and the Reformation had given wealth, power and influence to a rising middle class, who began to swarm over the globe. They never forgot their dependence on God, but they sailed under this motto: *God helps those who help themselves*. With astonishing self-confidence they planted their flags on foreign lands and claimed them before any European rival could. As they stepped ashore, they hailed the savage aborigines with the words: "Congratulations! You have just been discovered"; and then they asked: "Do you have any spices for sale? And is there any gold in these godforsaken parts?"

Am I painting a caricature? Listen for a moment to a report to the Treasurer of the monarchs of Spain by one Christophorus Columbus, admiral of the Fleet of the Ocean, after his first transatlantic voyage:

I discovered many islands, thickly peopled, of which I took possession without resistance in the name of our most illustrious Monarchs, by public proclamation and with unfurled banners. . . . None [of the natives] are possessed of any iron, neither have they weapons, [for] they are naturally timid and fearful, . . . very simple and honest, and exceedingly liberal with all they have . . . [With the crew] they bartered like idiots, objects of great value for trifles, which I forbade as being unjust, and myself gave them many beautiful and acceptable articles which I had brought with me, taking nothing from them in return. I did this in order that I might the more easily conciliate them, that they might be led to become Christians, and be inclined to entertain a regard for the King and Queen, our

Princes and all Spaniards, and that I might induce them to take an interest in seeking out and collecting, and delivering to us such things as they possessed in abundance, but which we greatly needed. . . .

Columbus, it turns out, is applying for state funding. His report concludes with:

I promise that with a little assistance afforded me by our most invincible sovereigns, I will procure them as much gold as they need, as great a quantity of spices, of cotton, and of mastic, and as many men for the service of the navy [galley slaves] as their Majesties may require. . . .

But these great and marvelous results are not to be attributed to any merit of mine, but to the holy Christian faith, and to the piety and religion of our Sovereigns; for that which the unaided intellect of man could not encompass, the spirit of God has granted to human exertions, for God is wont to hear the prayers of his servants who love his precepts even to the performance of apparent impossibilities. . . .

Therefore let the king and queen . . . render thanks to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has granted us so great a victory and such prosperity. Let processions be made, and sacred feasts be held, and the temples be adorned with festive boughs. Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven in the prospect of the salvation of the souls of so many nations hitherto lost. Let us also rejoice, as well on account of the exaltation of our faith, as on account of the increase of our temporal prosperity, of which not only Spain, but all Christendom will be partakers. *Dated at Lisbon, the 14th of March, in the year of Our Lord 1493.*³

Let us be fair. Columbus is merely continuing the pattern of the Crusades: engage in a holy conquest, and keep the spoils. The motives he lists add up to a mixture of evangelistic zeal and commercial instinct, of compassion for the lost and greed for material gain. An unholy mixture, perhaps, but composed, in my judgment, of equally sincere motivations.

Early modern Western colonialism was also an accomplice in the trade in human resources. The enslavement of Africans was not a Western invention. Western ship captains began by capitalizing on the age-old trade in slaves indigenous to Central and Northern Africa: they bought captives in West Africa from their captor-brothers and shipped them to the New World to make a profit supplying plantation owners with a cheap labor

force. When the first Dutch skipper got involved in this sordid business in 1596 and came home to sell his cargo, the city council of Middelburg ruled that a slave market would not be tolerated within their walls. Pieter van der Haagen was ordered to release his 130 black men and allow them to find jobs as free laborers.⁴ Within 30 years, however, the trade was condoned throughout the Dutch Republic, and for nearly a century Dutch slavers at times ranked closely behind the English, the Portuguese, and the French in tonnage and bodies. It took people like William Wilberforce and his Clapham Sect to turn the tide after 1807. A little

*The New Imperialism
imposed Western patterns
upon the world.*

earlier, the Governor of Upper Canada had already outlawed the slave trade into the colony—a first for North America, in fact for the West as a whole.

At about that time, Europeans were completing the race to claim the North American continent. While Russians raced eastward across Siberia to the Pacific coast and down the Alaskan panhandle, Western Europeans spread westward across the American continent from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean, where they arrived about 50 years later than the Russians. By a treaty of 1825, the British and the Russians divided the Northwest between them, but local topography so defied any accurate description of the boundary that it remained under dispute for the remainder of the century. In 1867, the USA was able to purchase Alaska—"Seward's ice box," we learned at school—and thus inherited a boundary dispute with British North America (just that year renamed Canada), a dispute which the aboriginals were told was settled in 1903.

What patterns did the old colonialism impose upon the world? It inaugurated the global economy, structured to the advantage of the West. It spread the gospel, mostly presented with Western trappings. It exported horses, firearms, and (unwittingly) infectious diseases. It modeled an enterprising spirit, acquisitiveness (at times naked greed), and mechanical know-how of all sorts. It

encouraged the view among Europeans that the world that mattered revolved around them.

The challenge was to see that while God provided every nation with the bounds of its habitation (Acts 17:26), some nations had developed faster than others. The dispersion of the nations since Babel was in principle undone at Pentecost and in practice began to be undone after renewed physical contact. The calling of the more advanced Western nations was to share the true knowledge of God and the gains made in the mastery of nature; and, equally, to remain humble and learn from fresh contacts such things as new crops to grow, a deeper respect for nature, and some of the finer points of social intercourse.

The nineteenth century gave a different color to the Western colonial enterprise as it was resumed and accelerated. It was now wedded to the Industrial Revolution. This revolution in secondary mechanized production, like the earlier revolutions in agricultural production, could arise only amid the necessary factors found uniquely in the West. There was an adequate agricultural base to permit a concentration on secondary production, and plenty of heaped-up capital to invest in large machines. Europe had a thrifty and self-reliant middle class, who had a high view of human effort and were willing to invest and run risks in the mundane work of money-making. And Europe was blessed—let us not forget—with a surd factor: the presence of a category of people called tinkers and inventors, persons endowed with creativity and perseverance.

Where did all that investment capital come from? It came from not consuming all the wealth acquired, from a sensible organization of commerce and credit, and from the riches of colonial empires. This last factor is troublesome, for it suggests, as some Indian historians have argued, that Britain's Industrial Revolution was accomplished "on the backs of the Indian peasant."⁵ We in North America have also to admit that many miles of our transcontinental railways were laid at the expense of underpaid Irish navvies and Chinese coolies.

The Industrial Revolution gave new impulses to overseas exploration and exploitation. Mechanized production was so efficient that new sources of raw material were eagerly sought, and they were so plentiful that new markets were

needed to sell the surplus. Now that Marxist-Leninism is an all but defunct ideology, it is easier to acknowledge that Marx and Lenin were on to something when they claimed that Western imperialism was driven by a search for markets and raw materials. After 1850, the trading nations of Europe and America stepped up their rivalry abroad. To link the oceans, canals were dug at Suez and Panama. Around the globe, remote shorelines and deserted islands became hosts to coaling stations that could bunker navy and merchant steamers from the West.

The race was on! It ignited opium wars in China, a scramble for Africa, the Boer Wars, and the division of Europe into two hostile armed camps—a system of security that ran out of control in July 1914 and engulfed the world in war.

Throughout these developments, where were the voices of Christian statesmen? They talked of guardianship over foreign nations to bring them to a level of political maturity and cultural refinement. Western superiority in all things—who could question it? Robert Louis Stevenson caught the spirit well in a poem from his delightful *Child's Garden of Verses* (1885):

Little Indian, Sioux or Crow,
Little frosty Eskimo,
Little Turk or Japanee,
O! Don't you wish that you were me?

You have curious things to eat,
I am fed on proper meat;
You must dwell beyond the foam,
but I am safe and live at home.

Stevenson wrote not only *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, but also a novella entitled *The Beach of Falesa* (1892), which was highly critical of British imperialism in the Pacific, exposing the exploitation of the natives, etc. Alas, the good it might have done was neutralized when editors and publisher heavily bowdlerized the text—with the author's permission!—to bring it into line with public tastes.⁶

But an un-muffled sound of the trumpet was never absent in those days either. William Ewart Gladstone was a "little Englander" who abhorred colonial conquests and understood the proud peoples that chafed under Western domination. He gave voice to their hatred of Western paternalism when he quoted them as saying, "We don't

want your good laws; we want our own.”⁷ Queen Victoria should have listened more to Gladstone, but she found him pompous and unctuous and instead let her pious ears be tickled by the seductive strains of a sly Disraeli, who called her the Mother of Egypt and had her proclaimed Empress of India. The same dissenting voice was heard during the 1880s, when the Empire of the Ottoman Turks was crumbling in the Balkans and the European powers began asking among themselves, “Who will inherit those lands?” “Why,” said Mr. Gladstone, “I should think the people who live there.” His was a voice not heard often enough.⁸

In the end, the New Imperialism of the nineteenth century imposed its patterns upon the world. It globalized Western ways, spreading science and technology, evident in dress, medical clinics, and schools. It exported the ideologies of both capitalism and socialism. It spawned national congresses and elected parliaments. It gave rise to a new kind of nationalism: the idea of self-determination as a right of every people, a claim that pitted Indians against the British, Indonesians against the Dutch, Indochinese against the French. When Pandit Nehru visited the Netherlands in the early '50s, the Dutch foreign minister Joseph Luns, escorting him from the airport in a limousine, pointed to the prosperous farms, the clean streets, and the modern office buildings and remarked: “Some day, Mr. President, your people will have all this too!” To which Nehru replied, grimly, “Yes; but we may have to come and *take it*.”⁹

Not until after World War II did the process of decolonization get underway. Nations emerged one after another, often with boundaries drawn by Europeans in disregard of ethnic diversity and timeless custom. Many of the newly freed peoples fell prey to exploitation by local leaders from dominant tribes who had elbowed their way to the top, consolidated their holds on military power, ordered fleets of jet fighters for good measure, and opened bank accounts in Switzerland. Few of these “liberators of their people” resembled George Washington.

Global missions

The conflicts of imperialism and post-colonial revolution contrast tragically with another world-

historical development—the extension of God’s Kingdom through the spread of the gospel. In God’s redemptive strategy, His restriction to Abraham and his offspring was a temporary tactic. Israel was the beachhead from which the whole earth would be reconquered. “I have come for the household of Israel,” said Christ, as he turned his back on the gentile woman pleading for help; “it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” “True enough,” was her comeback, “but even dogs eat the crumbs that fall off the table.” Christ called the faith of this woman “great”; it must have comforted him to hear this unwitting testimony to the global scope of his work.¹⁰ The Book of Acts records the struggle of

Imperialism and revolution contrasted tragically with the spread of God’s Kingdom.

the Spirit of Christ to coax the apostles out of their Judaic cage. But the Spirit did triumph, and the apostles began to tour the pagan world. On Paul’s second journey, the Spirit steered him northwest, straight to the port of Troas, where He gave Paul a vision of a Macedonian man crying out, “Come over and help us!” (Acts 16.)

From Europe the gospel would spread over the globe. Not from India, or China, or Africa. Though disciples had planted churches there, these huddled for safety and in some regions were completely stamped out. By contrast, the whole European continent was christianized before AD 1000, all the way from Ireland to the Ural mountains, from Sicily to Scandinavia.

The debate about cross-cultural missions is as old as the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), but it resumed among Roman Catholics in early modern times as they missionized Asia and the Americas. In the Far East, who was doing it right: Nobili (1577–1656), the Jesuits, or the Dominicans? The Italian Jesuit Roberto di Nobili, working in India, chose for the strategy of penetration through adaptation. He learned Tamil and translated the Psalms; he adopted the practices of a devout Hindu and became recognized as a Brahmin; he presented the gospel as a fifth sacred text,

complementing the Veda; he accepted the caste system and to people of lower rank he proffered the wafer of the eucharist at the end of a long pole. Nobili's method yielded hundreds of thousands of converts. But Dominicans complained to the pope that these new Indian Catholics were neither pure nor single-hearted in the faith. A century later Rome condemned caste distinctions and Hindu customs. Conversions ceased, and old converts lapsed back into heathenism.

Meanwhile the gospel had made significant inroads in China during the Manchu dynasty. Here the strategy of Jesuits was to give a place within the Christian religion to Chinese forms of spirituality such as ancestor veneration and nature worship. They made many converts, won the protection of the Emperor, and founded several hundred churches. This time, however, Dominicans and Franciscans complained that the Jesuits had made a pact with polytheism. Soon Rome was persuaded to condemn a number of traditional Chinese rites as idolatrous, and not long thereafter, also for other reasons, the Chinese in turn began to question their ability to accommodate Western ways and Western ideas. In the end, China turned its back on things Western, including "Western" religion.¹²

While Catholics developed their missions, one of the first Protestant ventures in foreign missions dates from 1670, when John Eliot was employed by the Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Natives of New England.¹³ Mission work expanded under the influence of continental Pietism, in which the Moravian Brethren took the lead. The 19th century became the great century of Protestant missions. Western churches—or rather, individual church members with a burden for overseas missions—heeded the call that came "from Greenland's icy mountains and Afric's foreign strand." The London Missionary Society was founded in 1795 and duly copied in Rotterdam in 1797 under the name The Netherlandic Missionary Society. Slowly but surely Bible translations and their interpreters were arriving in the British and Dutch colonies.

Apart from the question of contextualism, the missionary endeavors launched from Europe tended to have an individualistic focus, even though they were often blessed along corporative lines.

The late Harvey Smit, born in Shanghai and a long-term missionary to Japan until health considerations forced him to repatriate, once defended the following provocative thesis: "*The conversion of the Emperor, as a probable means to breaking down the resistance of the people to the Gospel, should constitute a conscious aim of the Christian missionary endeavor in Japan.*"¹⁴ Smit was attacked for his "calculating" suggestion: "Would you just forget the millions living in darkness?" "Not at all," he replied; "but they will follow once the Emperor is won!"¹⁵

Another example comes from Indonesia. After seventeen years of seemingly fruitless labor among the Toradja on Celebes (Sulawezi), missionaries Rev. Adriani and Rev. Kruyt were overjoyed when a number of schoolchildren asked to be baptized, whereupon the village chief started coming to church, to check it out! On July 4, 1909, the sermon text was Jesus' word to Zacchaeus: "Today I must be in your house." After the service the village chief got up and addressed the gathered, ending with: "So I say to you, heads of families and ward masters: meet separately with your charges and discuss whether we should become Christians. Then we can come together later and settle the matter." That Christmas, a hundred adults were baptized, including the village chief. It was the curtain raiser for the spread of the gospel through the entire region.¹⁶

Events like these have been repeated a thousand times. They remind us of two facts: first, that conversions of "households" are as genuine as the winning of "individual souls"; but also, that where cultural affinity is absent, fruitful dialogue requires patience. Decades without converts can be a blessing in disguise. It forces the missionary to get closer to the people and learn their language (also their unspoken "language"), to find out what their *worldview* is—that is, not just what gods they serve and what their rituals signify, but how their whole way of life is an idolatrous response to the presence of God, who is all around them, revealing himself in power and in majesty.

To begin to understand this complexity takes time. By the same token, if you want to teach global history you will have to *take the time*. You can't bone up on it in a summer. To do a half-

creditable job at teaching truthful things about a non-Western culture, you will need to assess its temper from the inside and to place it under the light of our common human condition, which is to do justice, raise children, love one's neighbor, be stewardly, trade fairly, speak reliably, shape things of beauty, etc. In this painstaking learning process, cross-cultural studies can also become fruitful for acquiring what Dordt College's statement of principles calls "serviceable insight." For you are then in a position to pose probing questions like these: To what challenge was that strange culture responding when they evolved this peculiar institution? What was there in those circumstances that made some response inescapable?

You might also ask what there is about another cultural configuration that can teach us Westerners something about *what life in God's creation requires*. Has Japanese feudalism, to take just one example, unearthed some element of justice that was ignored in Western Christendom, some element of which non-Japanese cultures exclaim, "that was good," *or*, "that was quite inappropriate, if not altogether inadequate," *or*, "that was fundamentally unjust?"¹⁷ In my life-time, I've gone from taking my turn at school in the '40s collecting money for Dutch missionaries to the Papuas of New Guinea, to witnessing American street evangelism in Amsterdam in the '80s, to meeting Christian missionaries from Korea recently in downtown Toronto. It seems the torch has passed to other continents—an interesting fact in light of its Western beginning!

Note also, however, how easy it was for early modern Catholic missionaries to slide from cross-cultural adaptation to syncretism! No better was the policy of Dutch Calvinists in Japan, who were given a trading monopoly in exchange for the pledge never to import missionaries, Bibles, or Christian literature. *Pecunia non olet*, "money stinketh not," and from the safe island of Deshima in Nagasaki harbor the Dutch for two centuries carried on a lucrative trade with the Japanese, until Commodore Perry forced access to the Japanese market for other trading nations from the West.

We shall not join today's chorus that condemns missions as "cultural genocide." It is important, however, to distinguish the specialized work of Christian missionaries from the broader mission

that Westerners increasingly felt to bring civilization, law and order, literacy, hygiene, and medical science to all those "lesser breeds without the law," to quote Rudyard Kipling. Even as sensational reports on the quest for the sources of the Nile appeared in newspapers in Paris, Boston, London, and New York, others, like Dr. David Livingstone, risked life and limb crisscrossing Africa to acquaint the natives with the blessings of Christian civilization and to serve future missionaries with maps of the region. An offshoot of this sort of activity was the hospital of Dr. Albert Schweitzer on the edge of a West-

*If you want to teach
global history you will
have to take the time to
learn other cultures.*

African jungle, but here the link to historic Christianity was all but lost and humanistic altruism showed the best face of which it is capable. Other combinations of gospel missions and "the white man's burden" proved particularly questionable. Studies by John Boer have shown how bringing the gospel was not only facilitated but also compromised as missionary societies penetrated Africa on the coattails of Western commercial ventures.¹⁸

Underlying this dubious mixture of motives in Western civilization—of spreading the gospel and imperialism—is the area of greatest conflict to shake Western civilization to its very foundations: the *ultimate* religious conflict. From the dawn of time, the Lord never allowed any one empire to rule over all people and leave no escape for anyone anywhere. (That frightful prospect may be reserved for the last days.) Yet time and again, rulers have tried to wield total power over people's lives. Moses had to test the pharaoh: would he allow that his slave people, the Hebrews, recognize a power higher than he? Daniel caused King Darius to submit to the same test: could the law demand that ultimate loyalty be given solely to the god-king of the Medes and Persians rather than to the God of heaven and earth? The conflict reached

a peak in imperial Rome, where the test became, Caesar or Christ? It is an issue of all ages, not least in modern Japan where to be a Christian means to stop being a loyal son of Nippon.

Globalization

When the Canadian author Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village,” he gave a name to what many were sensing: no matter where we travel today the world outwardly looks the same. Globalization is to a great extent Westernization; in fact, in some respects it is purely and simply Americanization. Outward likeness, however, does not always betoken inner similarity. Herman Dooyeweerd distinguished between an intensive and an extensive conception of world history. The *extensive* view is open to incorporating whatever happens anywhere on the face of the earth. Here world history becomes a mere matter of geography, lacking internal coherence. It is exemplified in Voltaire, whose approach yields little more than a loose collection of examples of cultural progress. A better conception of world history is the *intensive* kind. When this is conceived in human-centered terms, however, it includes in world history only those cultural developments where human rationality begins to exert a preponderant influence. In Hegel, but no less in Ranke, this approach yields a *Weltgeschichte* focused on the modern West and its “preliminary stages” in the past.¹⁹

Dooyeweerd’s analysis enables him to expose what is essentially a Eurocentric treatment of global history. A Christian treatment, by contrast, works with an intensive conception as well, but one that is rooted in the cultural mandate, the preserving grace of God, and the great commission—in short, in the universality of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, quite apart from any particular historical connections.

Thus far, in focusing on the relations between “the West and the rest” we have been employing an “extensive” conception of world history. It concerns “contacts between civilizations in space,”²⁰ which automatically invites the question of intercultural exchange. Other than exotic consumer products, Total Quality Management, and an assortment of oriental cults, what have Westerners imported from the East? In general,

far less than the reverse. Globalization has been very much one-way traffic: from here to there. This imbalance means that the world is rapidly being made over in our Western image. And it goes deeper than rap music in the Congo, Macdonald’s in Moscow, or the Internet in the Balkans. In 1900 Western ways were imposed by *force*: through gunboat diplomacy, economic extortion, and political infiltration. One hundred years later, Western ways are being imitated by *choice*. But what is being imitated? Automated machine production, a rationalist outlook and scientific approach to every problem, and, above all, a thoroughly secular way of life in a closed world, a life based not only on a desacralized world with demystified taboos—surely a redemptive development—but also a life in a world from which God has been shut out and where His laws have no compelling authority. Our public campuses show increasing numbers of visa students majoring in Chemical Engineering or Business Administration. We are exporting, and they are importing, the visible, material side of life. Is the soul or the spirit behind that life coming along with it? That is the great lack, observed Toynbee.²¹

For what are the inner vital forces that have nourished, rather than depraved, the outward material culture of the West? One could name the following: a spirit of innovation that knows how to relativize traditions; a spirit of initiative and enterprise that couples risk-taking with planning and hard work; a spirit of public service and engaged citizenship that finds outlets in democratic decision making and participatory government; a spirit of charity and mercy, even in the face of temptation or hardship, that stems from a morality rooted in Christian faith; a spirit of personal and social discipline that tolerates differences, accepts compromise, practices self-restraint, self-sacrifice, grace, and forgiveness; in short, a spirit of love of neighbor grounded in love of God. These are the spiritual roots—the imponderables of the history of culture—that have nourished Western ways. But globalization largely ignores these spiritual values that have spawned and sustained material, social, and political progress. The modern tragedy is exactly this, that *the West has shared its fruits without their roots*.

Those roots have been neglected, for two reasons:

(1) Westerners themselves no longer believe in or live out of them. The rational approach that enables stewardly planning was taken to excess when rationalism was embraced as the only valid approach to problem-solving. It replaced Christian Revelation as the public philosophy and standard of reliable truth. Introduced during the Renaissance, with its humanistic leanings, the pride of place accorded human reason turned from an elitist creed into a common ideal under Descartes, Locke, Voltaire. Beginning with the American and French revolutions, where this ideal was pursued in practice, the Western world struck out on the path of secularism. The Christian faith was privatized and the public domain withdrawn from the authoritative guidance and salutary influence of Christian teachings.

(2) The West's cultural inertia—the continuing momentum of Christendom—has nearly spent itself.²² What will take its place? What will instruct and inspire the human family as its members are learning to share the world under the security of a world order? A world order we desperately need, given the widespread “idolatry of the free market”²³ and the serious threats that must be tackled in the new millennium: the population pressure, the destruction of the biosphere, and the peril, still not eradicated, of nuclear self-destruction.

Toynbee held that a universal civilization needs to be borne up by a universal religion. He dreamt of a strange amalgam of Christianity and Hinduism as the future religion of the globe.²⁴ Here Toynbee cannot be our guide. The new Babel that is arising all around us needs *faithful witnesses* to the rule of Christ, and His rule alone—witnesses that must persevere until the curtain drops on the historical drama and creation is purged and renewed once for all. Any World History course we might teach would have to put forth that challenge.

Some concluding remarks

1. If we must teach World History, certainly our goal can not be to celebrate the West's moral superiority. But neither should we aim—as some Western skeptics and relativists masochistically are doing—to decry the predominantly Western

role in the process of globalization and to denounce all the fruits of our cultural imperialism, particularly the global spread of Christianity. More fruitful, I believe, would be an “intensive” approach to world history, one in which we would focus on humanity's common record of successes and failures, the instances or patterns of obedient and disobedient cultural formations, the comparative blessings and curses humankind has drawn down upon its own head, the new hopes and challenges that the world today presents us with. This intensive approach implies dialogue across age-old fences.

The only bridge for transcultural understanding is God's Revelation.

2. The bridge that enables such transnational and intercultural dialogues to take place cannot be technological progress, Western preponderance, mutual cultural enrichment, and common or comparable human achievements. Nor can it be the humanizing effect of the Christian religion or the civilizing effect of Christian moral teachings, however real these effects have been historically. All such bridges remain earthbound and are subject to the law of historical relativity. What is needed is to put the globe under a *metahistorical* spotlight. The only bridge that will carry the transcultural traffic we seek to promote is found in God's Revelation, in Creation and the Word, to which all are subject and from which all may derive the purpose of history and the meaning of life. That bridge has to be the common world we live in, the meaning of existence that we share, the invitation that has come to all people since the dawn of history to respond to the Creator by opening up creation's riches.

3. The Christian instructor of World History will want to teach his or her students—whether they be fellow Christians or Western secularists, non-Western heathens, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or non-Western Christians—“that Revelation is a reality and that man everywhere must respond and that that is why we can talk together.” The non-believer, no less than the Christian, “lives in the

world God created, the world that is upheld and driven onward by His Word and by His Spirit. . . . All men respond to the *one* law-order.”²⁵

4. Central to our study of World History should be the religious dynamic of historical development, by which I mean the warfare in the hearts of men and women—and, by consequence, in the laws and customs and institutions of a culture—between the Spirit of God and the spirit from the abyss. The divine injunctions that light up in revelation, both in creation and in Scripture, address all of us, illuminating the extent to which our multiform cultures have been unfolding toward God or away from him. Such a treatment of World History—no different from national, regional or local history—should aim to raise questions about whether our cultural products have been wholesome formations or destructive “distortions of creational revelation.” Such an approach allows all ages and all peoples “to stand in their full dignity . . . but a dignity which takes account of the fact that they are radically fallen from fellowship with God,” a condition of which people are cured only when the healing message of the gospel renews their hearts and begins to permeate their culture.²⁶

5. The Christian philosopher I have been quoting, H. Evan Runner, speaks of the “overwhelming, convincing testimony of the revelational creation-ordinances of God,” a notion that is reinforced by the missiologist Johan Bavinck, who has described evidence among all nations of the suppression and substitution of divine revelation.²⁷ Runner continues in the same context quoted above:

Once you’ve seen that all the scientific and pre-scientific work is given direction by a person’s religious stance in the heart with respect to God’s revelation, then you really begin to work with people in the creational fullness of their life and your life and the life of culture. Then you get a true encounter, then you have true dialogue. Even if there is an antithesis of direction with respect to that ultimate revelation, you *meet* each other in the notion that these positions, these views, are both there because we’ve got to answer some kind of a revelational impingement on our lives. And both of us are called to order in that situation by the Word of God. God has given an order for human life, and that order is revelation which addresses us inescapably and calls us to obedience, to acceptance, to walking in its light, and so to blessedness.²⁸

6. If I mount a course in World History, I will want to concentrate in all times and places on patterns of (normative and anti-normative) education and communication, economy and artistry, justice and equity, etc. And when I and my class find much to criticize, we will remember to temper justice with mercy, to remind each other that “There but for the grace of God go I,” and to repeat after Ranke, “Every age is immediate to God.” And when we find something to admire, we will not succumb to hero worship but we shall say, “Look what God has done in and through human beings, and sometimes in spite of them.”

7. Perhaps I have recounted too many flash-points and not enough patterns. What do my vignettes from the grab-bag of history add up to? I suspect the patterns of World History differ not all that much from those of Western History. To our Western eyes, the patterns of world history do appear more commonplace and longer-lasting. For does World History, in the aggregate, have as many incisive revolutions and dramatic paradigm shifts as have occurred in the West in so short a space of time? Then again, humanity is the same throughout the world: the challenge to give shape to human life comes to all, and sin and shortsightedness, as well as grace and generosity are found the globe over.

END NOTES

1. C.S. Lewis, “Christianity and Culture,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 33 (emphasis added).
2. Louis J. Voskuil, “Western Civilization or World History: A True Dilemma?” *Pro Rege* XXVII/3 (June 2000), p. 18.
3. Exerpts taken from H. J. Carroll et al., eds., *The Development of Civilization: A Documentary History of Politics, Society, and Thought*, rev. ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1969), 1:396-98.
4. J. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1815* (Cambridge UP, 1990), 6, 10-13, 302f.
5. Cited by David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge UP, 1969), 35.
6. The unexpurgated text did not appear until Stanford University Press brought it out in 1984.
7. Speech in Parliament, April 1886, on the first bill proposing Home Rule for the Irish; excerpted in Brian Tierney et al., eds., *Great Issues in Western Civilization*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1976), 2:411.

8. *Ibid.*, 408; campaign speech in the Waverly Market, Edinburgh, Nov. 1879.
9. Told by Mr. Luns in a university lecture, Minerva Paviljoen, Amsterdam, fall 1965.
10. Cf. Matthew 15:21-28.
11. K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1939-45), 3:259-262, 269f.
12. *Ibid.*, 339-355.
13. For a fascinating peek behind the scenes, see the correspondence between Eliot and one of the Corporation's chief benefactors, the scientist Robert Boyle, in *The Works of Robert Boyle* (London, 1772; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965), 1:ccv-ccxiv.
14. Proposition XIV, appended to H. Smit, *Kierkegaard's Pilgrimage of Man* (Delft: Meinema, 1965).
15. Said in the course of the public defense of his doctoral thesis (see n. 13), Free University, Amsterdam, 23 May 1965.
16. A. Alga, *Dispereert niet* (Franeker, Neth.: Wever, 1946), 11:26f.; 3rd ed. (1964), 4:379.
17. This approach is further developed in essay 14 of M. C. Smit, *Toward a Reformed Conception of History* (forthcoming).
18. J. H. Boer, *Missionary Messengers of Liberation in a Colonial Context* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), 473-492, *et passim*; idem, *Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ?* (Ithaca: Day Star Press, 1984).
19. H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Press, 1953-58), 2:279-282, 354.
20. Title of the main division in vol. 9 of *A Study of History* by Arnold J. Toynbee. Vol. 10, pp.1-166, entitled *Contacts Between Civilization in Time*, deals largely with the phenomenon of "renaissances." It still repays to look at these volumes, if only for their insightful concepts and down-to-earth terminology.
21. See A. J. Toynbee, *The World and the West* (Oxford UP, 1953), 66-84.
22. Less pessimistic on this score is Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge UP, 1996), 226-242.
23. Phrase in Leslie Newbigin, "Reply to Konrad Raiser," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18.2 (1994): 52. I owe this reference to my colleague Michael Goheen.
24. Cf. E. W. F. Tomlin, ed., *Arnold Toynbee: A Selection from His Works* (Oxford UP, 1978), xvii f.
25. From the interview with Professor H. Evan Runner in J. N. Kraay and A. Tol, eds., *Hearing and Doing: Philosophical Essays Dedicated to H. Evan Runner* (Toronto: Wedge, 1973), 358.
26. *Ibid.*, 357.
27. J. H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), ch. v: The Problem of Natural Religion; idem, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Press, 1964), Part Two, ch. II: The Main Lines of Elenctics.
28. *Op. cit.*, 358.